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PAT Driver Pay Gouges Taxpayers

The Port Authority just released its 2005 wages for union employees as well as the expected wage rates and salaries for all 2006 personnel. As expected, apologists for the Port Authority (PAT) were waiting with their excuses. For example: yes, there is a lot of overtime, but it's cheaper to pay overtime than to hire new drivers. What they fail to mention is that wages and benefits continue to drain PAT funds as it once again faces a large budget deficit. Nor is overuse of overtime a new phenomenon at PAT.

According to news reports, the top paid PAT operator collected more than \$90,000 in wages for 2005 including more than \$41,000 in overtime. It was noted that the official top hourly rate for bus and trolley operators is \$22.18 per hour. Newspaper accounts made a point of mentioning that PAT wages are only the 24th highest among transit systems across the country.

But this city-to-city wage comparison has major shortcomings. First, the data show the highest bus and trolley wages earned by any driver, not the average for all drivers. Secondly, there is no mention of the cost of living differences between cities that rank higher in driver pay. Finally, there is no mention of the efficiency of these other systems versus PAT, i.e., the driver cost per passenger. With fairly flat ridership and rising costs over the last few years, Pat's driver cost per passenger is now among the highest in the country.

The most recent National Transit Administration data (2004) place the average PAT bus driver wage at \$20.50 per hour. This was much more than drivers earned in Los Angeles (\$18.87), Atlanta (\$16.88), and Charlotte (\$16.16). It was less than drivers' wages in San Francisco (\$25.44), Boston (\$24.26), and Chicago (\$21.17). But these wages are not adjusted for cost of living differences. The table below shows how Port Authority wages stack up to wages in other cities after adjusting to calculate what drivers in other cities would have to earn to maintain their current living standards if they moved to Pittsburgh.

City	Average Hourly Wage (\$)	Adjusted Hourly Wage (\$)*
<i>Port Authority</i>	<i>\$20.50</i>	<i>\$20.50</i>
Columbus	20.51	18.65
Cleveland	18.79	17.61
Denver	18.15	16.78
Chicago	21.17	16.78
Kansas City	16.91	16.69

Boston	24.26	16.66
Charlotte	16.16	16.26
Atlanta	16.88	16.12
San Francisco	25.44	13.81
Los Angeles	18.87	11.04

* Rate necessary to maintain current living standard in Pittsburgh.

On a cost of living adjusted basis, PAT's hourly wage rate is the highest in the country. Claims that the wages paid to PAT drivers are in line, if not lower than other cities, is grossly misleading. Consider too that drivers in other western Pennsylvania transit systems earn only \$13 to \$14 per hour-- \$8 or 40 percent less than PAT drivers. Moreover, PAT drivers have some of the most generous fringe benefits of any workers anywhere.

Finally, it is noteworthy that durable goods manufacturing employees earn only \$17 per hour, \$5 or 20 percent less than PAT drivers. We are constantly told that the region needs manufacturing jobs as family supporting jobs. Obviously, good private sector job wages aren't good enough if PAT defenders are to be believed. Only good unionized right-to-strike public sector jobs in public monopolies will do for PAT advocates.

The truth is that in a competitive setting and with no right-to-strike leverage to extort extravagant taxpayer subsidies, PAT drivers' would be making significantly lower wages that are more in line with those of cities like Kansas City, Denver, Atlanta, and Charlotte.

PAT drivers are very well paid by any measure—far better than their fellow drivers around the country. Sadly, in Pennsylvania and Allegheny County the above market wages are perpetually countenanced by officials and never dealt with. Taxpayers are treated with disdain reserved for second-class citizens.

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